

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

overwhelmed with visions and manifestations of divine mysteries. " To explain in our defective language what I saw," she said in after years, " would seem to me like blaspheming the Lord, or dishonouring Him by my speech ; so great is the distance between what the intellect, when rapt and illumined and strengthened by God, apprehends, and what can be expressed with words, that they seem almost contradictory." As she prayed to the Lord for purity of heart that she might worthily receive the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, it seemed to her that a torrent of mingled blood and fire was poured down upon her, to the mystical cleansing of body and soul. And, a day or two later, she believed that Christ had drawn her heart from her side, and given her His own in exchange, with which she was henceforth to live. "Do you not see, father," she said to Fra Tommaso della Fonte, " that I am no longer she who I was, but that I am changed into another person ? Such gladness and such delight possess my mind, that I marvel greatly how my soul can stay in my body. Such ardour is in my soul that this material, exterior fire seems to me cold by comparison." Praying for this confessor and her other companions, that eternal life might be their portion, and seeking a sign from Christ that her prayers were heard, she felt the palm of her outstretched hand pierced through by an invisible nail of iron, and thus received the foretaste of the *stigmata*, the imprint of the five wounds of Our Lord in His passion, which afterwards—albeit invisible—were to be hers. "The abundance of graces and revelations and most manifest visions," writes Fra Raimondo, "at this time so completely filled the soul of this holy virgin, that she began utterly to waste away through the greatness of her love ; and she became so weak that she could no more rise up from her bed, albeit she suffered nought else save only the love of her eternal Bridegroom, upon whose name she called continually, as though bereft of sense."

She prayed earnestly that she might soon be delivered from the body that kept her from the embraces of her Spouse, and that, if this might not yet be, in the meanwhile she might at least